



FIGHT CRIME: INVEST IN KIDS *California*

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STATE DIRECTOR

Barrie Becker, J.D.

August 17, 2004

Re: Support for Access to Quality Child Care and Youth Mental Health Programs

Dear California Performance Review Commission Members:

As an organization of nearly 300 California sheriffs, police chiefs, district attorneys and crime survivors, we know that there is no substitute for tough law enforcement. But we also know from years of crime-fighting experience and rigorous research evidence that to safeguard our communities we need to take steps to prevent kids from ever becoming involved in crime—such as providing quality preschool, child care, and youth mental health programs.

As the California Performance Review (CPR) moves forward in its recommendations related to child care access and quality and the Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) program, we urge you to listen to those on the front lines and keep in mind the public safety benefits of these kinds of early investments.

Child Care Access and Quality (HHS04, HHS07)

Research shows that quality preschool and child care programs help cut crime, reduce disruptive behavior and promote academic success. For example, a longitudinal 15-year study recently published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, following over 1,000 children in government-funded centers for 3- and 4-year-olds, showed that children left out of these centers were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by the time they turned 18 than enrolled children.

Not only does quality child care save lives, it also saves tax dollars. A study of the same program estimated that every dollar invested saved taxpayers nearly \$3 from reduced crime, less remedial education and other savings. When the benefits to the public and participants are added in, every dollar invested resulted in \$7 in benefits.

Yet, while the State provides child care assistance for some low-income families, its subsidy programs are so underfunded that only about one-third of eligible children actually receive them, leaving close to one million eligible children ages 0 to 12 in need of subsidies. According to conservative estimates, about 280,000 of these children would use assistance if it were available. Many of these children are left languishing on long waiting lists or do not even bother applying for assistance because they know it is not available.

Regarding the CPR recommendations:

- We are concerned that recommendations related to the “Stages” of CalWORKs Child Care may reflect an intent to eliminate what has been, in practice, a guarantee of child care assistance through Stage 3 to families who left welfare for work (until their children are no longer age-eligible or their income exceeds 75% of State Median Income). Given long waiting lists for other child care assistance programs, without continued support these families would likely lose access to child care assistance, with the risk of forcing families back onto welfare.
- We are concerned about the possible elimination of the “Latchkey” before- and after-school program that serves over 10,000 school-age children from working families. Any consolidation of this program should ensure continued funding of these services.
- We commend the commitment to “quality” child care programs, but would object to any proposal that increases reimbursement for quality programs by lowering reimbursement rates for licensed providers.

Mental Health/EPSTD (HHS02)

Research shows that quality mental health treatment is essential to prevent many youth with mental health problems from acting out, committing crime, and heading down the wrong path. For example, a study of one comprehensive program found that juvenile offenders in the program had a 20 percent lower rate of recidivism than similar youth in control groups.

Regarding the CPR recommendations, particularly the proposed realignment of the EPSTD program, we urge you to place high value on protecting the integrity and benefits of this program, which serves thousands of youth who otherwise might have been placed in costly psychiatric institutions, group homes, or juvenile justice institutions.

The juvenile justice and county probation systems are just beginning to utilize EPSTD to fund mental health, drug treatment and associated services to improve outcomes for delinquent youth. While concerns have been raised about the growth in state expenditures for EPSTD mental health services, those costs are a bargain, compared to the costs to our communities if young people continue down the wrong path. Providing a youth with intensive mental health services under EPSTD represents just one-eighth the cost to taxpayers of sending a youth to the California Youth Authority, and EPSTD investments yield further benefits as young people are restored to functionality, join the workforce, pay taxes and build communities.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,



Barrie Becker
State Director



Brian Lee
Policy Director